

POLITICAL MONITOR No. 8

OFFICIAL MEDIA

FOREIGN EMBASSIES ISSUES STATEMENT ON MYANMAR ELECTIONS

A joint statement welcoming and supporting the upcoming elections in Myanmar later this year was issued by embassies of Australia, Denmark, the European Union, Norway, Switzerland, the United Kingdom and the United States of America. The statement dated 3 March, highlighted that the election will be an important milestone in Myanmar's transition to democracy and provides an opportunity to reaffirm to the world its commitment to political reform. "And as development partners would support Myanmar's efforts to prepare for the elections and that the successful holding of the 2015 elections is the responsibility of the Myanmar government. Furthermore, the success will be measured by the by the integrity of the electoral process and an outcome that reflects the will of the people of this country. As donors and partners, we also commit to adhere to the principles of transparency, inclusiveness and equity. Our assistance aims to support and institutionalize the democratic process, and does not support any specific party or candidate," the statement says.¹

CONTINUED FIGHTING IN LAUKKAI REGION, SHAN STATE

After continued clashes supported by air and artillery strikes Tatmadaw columns have captured strategic points 1319, 1789, 2014 during the period 1 to 11 March. On 1 March, government troops occupied point 1319 and were able to reopen the Laukkai-Kongyan communication route. A military column also clashed with Kokang group east of Kywepa Village in Laukkai region on 4 March. Government troops were engaged in fights with combined insurgent groups of Kokang, Palaung and Rakhine near Lawkuakyaing village on 6 March. Fighting also intensified as government forces launched 6 airstrikes on to retake strategic Kokang positions including Point 1753 Hill on 7 March. Tatmadaw suffered 8 dead and 51 others injured. On 9 March, government troops clashed with MNDAA forces near Lonhtan village and occupied MNDAA based-hills after launching 4 airstrikes. Heavy fighting also ensued on 10 March as the Tatmadaw shelled Kokang bases near the China-Myanmar border and continued their launch of massive security operations in nearby areas. Clashes left the Tatmadaw with 2 dead and 7 wounded. Government forces also managed to seize ammunition, firearms, drugs and related materials and equipment during the clashes with Kokang group.²

¹ Joint Statement on Election Support from the Embassies of Australia, Denmark, the European Union, Norway, Switzerland, the United Kingdom, and the United States of America –
<http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs21/GNLM2015-03-04-red.pdf> (GNLM) 4 March 2015 (p. 1 & 9)

² Tatmadaw columns reopen Laukkai-Kongyan road for secure transport after occupying hills –
<http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs21/GNLM2015-03-02-red.pdf> (GNLM) 2 March 2015 (p. 2)/
Government troops take strategic hill –
http://issuu.com/zawzaw5/docs/3_mar-15_gnlm (GNLM) 3 March 2015 (p. 3)/
Kokang insurgents under attack of government troops in Laukkai –
<http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs21/GNLM2015-03-04-red.pdf> (GNLM) 4 March 2015 (p. 9)/
Military columns seize arms and ammunitions from Kokang insurgents in clashes –
<http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs21/GNLM2015-03-06-red.pdf> (GNLM) 6 March 2015 (p. 9)/
Fights intensify between Kokang insurgents and gov't troops –
<http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs21/GNLM2015-03-08-red.pdf> (GNLM) 8 March 2015 (p. 3)/
Tatmadaw launches operations on point 0753 hill and nearby hilltops –
<http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs21/GNLM2015-03-09-red.pdf> (GNLM) 9 March 2015 (p. 2)/
Fierce fighting continues near strategic hills in Kokang SAZ –
<http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs21/GNLM2015-03-10-red.pdf> (GNLM) 10 March 2015 (p. 3)/
Government troops retake insurgent-held hills –
<http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs21/GNLM2015-03-11-red.pdf> (GNLM) 11 March 2015 (p. 3)

MYANMAR, CHINA EXCHANGE VIEWS ON MAINTENANCE OF LAW AND ORDER IN BORDER AREA

Myanmar-China Friendship Association Special delegation led by Patron U Tin Oo and Chairman U Sein Win Aung accompanied by Secretary of the Association U Myo Aung visited the People's Republic of China from 3 to 8 March 2015 at the invitation of Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China. While in Beijing, the delegation met Chinese Vice-Minister for Foreign Affairs Liu Zhenmin, Special Envoy for Asian Affairs of Ministry of Foreign Affairs Wang Yingfang and Executive Vice Chairman of China-Myanmar Friendship Association Geng Zhiyuan. During the meetings, they discussed matters related to promoting the friendly relations and cooperation, and also exchanged views on maintenance of law and order in border area. Myanmar delegation also expressed appreciation to Chinese government for humanitarian assistance provided to people who temporarily came to China for security concern. The delegation also visited Yunnan Province from 5 to 8 March and met the Standing Committee member of the Communist Party of Yunnan Province Meng Sutie. The Myanmar delegation also visited Lincang County on 7 March and held talks with the party secretary of Lincang municipal city Li Xiaoping and visited the temporary settlements at boundary pillar nos. 137, 127 and 125 set up by Chinese government for people who temporarily came from Kokang region to China for security concern. Delegation met with 1100 temporary displaced people living in temporary camp at boundary pillar no. 137 and about 1500 people at boundary pillar no. 127 camp. Senior officials from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs from China and Myanmar held discussions 8 March in Muse, northern Shan State and discussed cooperation based on existing friendly relations for maintaining peace and stability and restoring law and order in the border area, and for earliest and safe return of people who are temporarily taking shelters in China for security concern to their homes.³

POLICE CLEAR LETPADAN PROTEST SITE

Police violently dispersed a student protest in Letpadan, Bago Region on 10 March and arrested 127 protesters after clashes. The protesters forcibly tried to liberate from the surrounding of police, turning the sit-in protest to violence between the both sides. A total of 16 police were wounded in the incident. The arrested protesters include 52 male students, 13 female students, 62 civilians including 55 male and seven women, totalling 127, according to the Ministry of Home Affairs.⁴

Pyithu Hluttaw (Lower House) sessions

The 12th Regular Session of the First Pyithu Hluttaw (Lower House) held its 24th day meeting on 10 March and discussed the following questions and issues related to the upcoming general elections later this year.

- **MP Khin Thandar from Tada-U constituency asked if action would be taken against those violating laws on electioneering. U Win Ko from the Union Election Commission (UEC) stated that nobody was above the election law and that lawsuits could be filed in police stations as for violation of laws prescribed in Section 13. The Union Election Commission announced the Election Law to take action against violators on 16 January this year, according to the official.**
- **MP U Pe Than from Myebon Constituency, Rakhine State asked whether incumbent representatives and candidates need to abide by the electioneering law and the election law. UEC official Win Ko, said that all must obey the laws stipulated laws announced that**

³ Myanmar, China exchange views on maintenance of law and order in border area – <http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs21/GNLM2015-03-09-red.pdf> (GNLM) 9 March 2015 (p. 2)/ Myanmar, China discuss restoring law and order in border area – <http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs21/GNLM2015-03-09-red.pdf> (GNLM) 9 March 2015 (p. 3)

⁴ Police clear Letpadan protest site – <http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs21/GNLM2015-03-11-red.pdf> (GNLM) 11 March 2015 (p. 2)

action would be taken against political parties if found soliciting for votes. The official also added that speeches and leaflet distribution must be in line with the existing law and the election law.⁵

Pyidaungsu Hluttaw (Union Parliament) sessions

The 12th Regular Session of the First Pyidaungsu Hluttaw (Union Parliament) held its 24th day meeting on 11 March and discussed issues related to the loan from EXIM Bank of China for the Myanmar Police Force.

- The Deputy Minister for Home Affairs Brig-General Kyaw Zan Myint said that **Myanmar Police Force is responsible for the rule of law, community tranquillity, prevention of drug trafficking, and public services and it is now taking more comprehensive measures for life security, stability and the rule of law. As a result, it has recruited more police but it faces with 69.25 per cent shortage of vehicles and the Yuan 246 million loan will enable the police to buy required vehicles and vessels. The deputy minister also told the session that the vehicles and vessel will be purchased through tender in a transparent manner. The session approved the loan from China's Exim Bank for Myanmar Police Force.**⁶

POLITICAL PARTIES URGED TO REGISTER NOT LATER THAN 30 APRIL

The Union Election Commission (UEC) issued a press release dated 11 March which stated that the commission allows establishment of political parties by at least 15 persons under the Section 3 (a) of the Political Parties Registration Law. There remains over 7 months to the general elections to be held in late October or early November 2015. Those wishing to set up political parties are to apply at the UEC, not later than 30 April 2015, so as to establish and register the political parties in time and to carry out electoral tasks and canvassing before the elections.⁷

UNOFFICIAL MEDIA

FIGHTING BETWEEN BURMA ARMY AND KAREN CONTINUES TO SPREAD STATEWIDE

Fighting broke out in Papun Township between government troops and the Karen National Liberation Army (KNLA) on 27 February that resulted in one Karen soldier killed and one wounded. The fighting happened in territory under the control of the KNLA's 5th Brigade.

An official from Karen National Union (KNU) Padoh Saw Pha Gaw, confirmed that the fighting was between government troops Light Infantry Battalion (LIB) 543 under Military Operation Command (MOC) #5 based in Kho Thaw Kho camp and local KNLA soldiers. Padoh Saw Pha Gaw said that the fighting occurred as Burma army coming into restricted area of KNLA controlled territory.

In speaking to the local media Padoh Saw Pha Gaw said, "We asked them not to go beyond 100 yards from the car road. The fighting took place 300 yards from the car road. The fighting lasted only a few minutes. There were only a few of our soldiers. One of them was killed and one wounded. We don't know about casualties on the enemy side. I want to emphasize that during a time when we are trying to reach a concrete ceasefire agreement, this incident should not happen." Sources from the KNLA 5th Brigade said that they had reported the incident to their headquarters.

The Minister for Border Security Affairs for Karen State Colonel Aung Lwin, said, "I can only say at this point that there was an incident. I haven't got detail information about it yet. We have less

⁵ Pyithu Hluttaw explains laws on electioneering and campaigning activities – <http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs21/GNLM2015-03-11-red.pdf> (GNLM) 11 March 2015 (p. 2)

⁶ Pyidaungsu Hluttaw approves loan for MPF – <http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs21/GNLM2015-03-12-red.pdf> (GNLM) 12 March 2015 (p. 2)

⁷ Political parties urged to register not later than 30 April – <http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs21/GNLM2015-03-12-red.pdf> (GNLM) 12 March 2015 (p. 3)

communication with Southern [Burma army] Command. Officers from the Southern Command have been in contact with U Roger Khin [Padoh Roger Khin, Defense Department head of the Karen National Union]. They have had phone conversation, and I think they can resolve the issue.”

This latest incident is the third conflict in the past week. Recent fighting in Karen State also occurred on 28 February, between soldiers from the KNLA’s 6th Brigade Headquarters, Special Column and government militia, Border Guard Force soldiers from its Battalion 1022 that took place on the way from Maw Hto Talay and Tha Blu Koh Khi village, six miles south of Myawaddy Town. There was also fighting between troops led by the former Democratic Karen Benevolent Army, Colonel Saw San Aung and Burma Army soldiers under its Military Operation Command (MOC) #13 based in Kyaikdon Town on 27 February.⁸

GOVERNMENT TROOPS AND RCSS (SOUTH) CLASH

Fighting has again flared between the Burma Army (Tatmadaw) and the Shan State Army-South (SSA-South), with a member of the rebel group accusing government troops of staging an attack on its base in a village of Shan State’s Mauk Mae Township. The clashes on 28 February comes three weeks after the ethnic armed group signed a pledge of commitment to Burma’s peace process with the government, which for its part agreed to work toward preventing further armed clashes and “building a Union based on democratic and federal principles.”

Col. Sai Oo of the SSA-South accused the government of “taking political advantage” of the ethnic armed group without practicing a genuine détente. “They [the Burma Army] got some tip that there was training at our base,” he said. “We were only having a capacity-building training for youth, however, not military training. So, they came to attack our base. The fighting lasted two hours. We have not yet heard of any casualties.” “We are finding that they [the government] did not sign it for peace, they just took political advantage of our group by getting us to sign,” said Sai Oo.

“They [Burma Army troops on the ground] have to listen to orders,” Sai Oo said. “Of course they hate to fight, but they have to do it. Their orders came from above, as we know. But we do not know which senior army officer ordered them to attack us. We do not think that the ground troops would be disregarding orders from above in coming to attack us.”⁹

WA ASKED NOT TO PROVIDE ARMS TO KOKANG REBELS

The Burma Army (Tatmadaw) summoned representatives of the United Wa State Army (UWSA) to ask them not to provide arms or ammunition to Kokang group in eastern Burma, where conflict has raged between rebels and government troops since early February.

UWSA spokesperson Aung Myint said that 7 representatives, including a Brigadier-General, were called to the meeting in Lashio, Shan State. “Our delegates told us that [the Burma Army] asked them not to provide Kokang with arms,” he said. The delegates were invited by Lt-Gen Aung Than Htut from office of the commander-in-chief, he said.

On 22 February, state media reported that Kokang group, known as the Myanmar National Democratic Alliance Army (MNDAA) had rebuilt their strength to regain their area with the help of the UWSA” and

⁸ Fighting between Burma Army and Karen Continues to Spread State-wide – <http://karennews.org/2015/03/fighting-between-burma-army-and-karen-continues-to-spread-statewide.html/> (Karen News) 3 March 2015/
Karen Soldiers and Gov’t Militia Fight - One Killed and Two Wounded – <http://karennews.org/2015/03/karen-soldiers-and-govt-militia-fight-one-killed-and-two-wounded.html/> (Karen News) 1 March 2015

⁹ Burma Army, Shan Rebel Peace Pledge Signatory Clash – <http://www.irrawaddy.org/burma/burma-army-shan-rebel-peace-pledge-signatory-clash.html> (the Irrawaddy) 3 March 2015

other armed groups. The report, which was based on a press conference led by Lt-Gen Mya Tun Oo, said that the MNDA possessed a number of weapons “including Type 81-1 assault rifle said to be manufactured by UWSA.”

The UWSA has denied allegations of providing arms to the MNDA, claiming instead that the weapons in question were acquired long before the current conflict erupted. “It’s not that they just got the weapons, they have had them since the time of Burmese Communist Party (BCP),” Aung Myint said, referring to an earlier era of the groups’ histories, when both were part of the China-backed CPB before it collapsed and splintered in 1989. “There were secret deals in the past and those are the weapons [the MNDA procured] in the past,” he added.

State media also reported on Feb. 22 that a brigade comprising four units of UWSA troops were part of National Solidarity Army involved in the conflict, a claim that was also addressed during Wednesday’s meeting. Aung Myint said that Aung Than Htut told the delegation the military recognized that the claim was untrue.

At least one other ethnic armed group said to be involved in the conflict—Mongla’s National Democratic Alliance Army (NDAA)—has also denied the claim. NDAA spokesperson Kyi Maung told The Irrawaddy that it was “not involved,” adding that the Burma Army had been seen carrying out military exercises near the group’s territory in Mongla Special Region. Kyi Maung said that ten Burma Army “tanks” arrived near the boundary between Mongla and Kengtung townships on 5 March morning for field exercises, adding that the army explained “they were afraid the tanks would go rusty if left unattended for a long time.” While the group enjoys stable relations with the government, Kyi Maung said that the current military exercises could “lead to misunderstanding” and “cause concern among local people.”¹⁰

USDP ELECTS 90% OF THEIR REPRESENTATIVES FOR THE 2015 ELECTIONS IN MON STATE

The Union Solidarity and Development Party (USDP) have elected 90 percent of its party representatives to contest upcoming 2015 elections in Mon State. According to the Secretary of Mon State’s USDP Thant Zin, this is the first time the party has elected its representatives, who have the potential to win the elections, and the next time the party will elect more representatives, reaching 100%. “The party will select those who are among Hluttaw representatives, [who have the] possibility of winning. Ten percent [of party representatives] remain unsure and there can be some changes,” said U Thant Zin.

According to the Union Election Commission (UEC), the date on which the elections are to be held will be officially announced in August, although the commission has stated that the 2015 general election will take place in either October or November of this year. In Mon State, the voter registration process for the 2015 general election will begin March 3rd, according to the Mon State Election Sub-Commission. According to the UEC, the first phase of the nationwide voter registration process took place from November-December 2014, the second phase ran from January-February, 2015, while the third and fourth phases took place from January-March, 2015 and February-April, 2015, respectively.¹¹

NLD MEMBERS PUT OFF CHINA VISIT

The spokesperson for the National League for Democracy (NLD) Nyan Win said that the NLD’s upcoming visit to the People’s Republic of China has been postponed. At the invitation of China, representatives from the NLD were planning to visit China for 8 days this month. “We have cancelled

¹⁰ Wa Asked Not to Provide Arms to Kokang Rebels – <http://www.irrawaddy.org/burma/wa-asked-not-to-provide-arms-to-kokang-rebels.html> (the Irrawaddy) 6 March 2015

¹¹ USDP elects 90% of their representatives for the 2015 elections in Mon State – <http://monnews.org/2015/03/02/usdp-elects-90-representatives-2015-elections-mon-state/> (Independent Mon News Agency) 2 March 2015

the trip. The reason is that we don't have time. But we mean the visit has been postponed. We will consider it later," said Nyan Win.

Phyo Zeyar Thaw, a parliamentarian and parliamentary affairs spokesperson for NLD leader Suu Kyi, also confirmed that she would not make a China trip this month. Member of the NLD's central committee for election victory Sharmee, who was selected to be a member of the delegation, said: "The trip has been called off. We planned a 20-member delegation. I heard we were invited by the Chinese government."

Some NLD members have paid several visits to China at the invitation of the ruling Chinese Communist Party. Reports also circulated last year that Suu Kyi would visit China in December. In meeting with the media on November 5, she said: "I am not prepared yet to visit China. I cannot say anything about the visit because I have no precise plans. But if I meet Chinese leaders, I will discuss things for mutual interest and benefits." Suu Kyi had said the country's second general election in 2015 is more important than the 2010 election.¹²

SHAN MP SWAPS PARTIES

Lower House MP Sai Thiha Kyaw has left the Shan Nationalities Democratic Party (SNDP) for the Shan Nationalities League for Democracy (SNLD). "The reason for changing is to encourage the voters in my constituency. The work procedures and policies of the SNLD fit my plans. For that reason, I resigned from the SNDP," Sai Thiha Kyaw said.

The spokesperson of the SNLD Sai Leik, said: "It is not a problem. Those doing politics must be mature. One has the right to change parties. The members from our party may resign of their own volition. It is a democratic right."

Vice Chair of the SNDP Sai Hsaung, said: "The change of the party members depends on individual wishes. The change of party does not directly have an effect on the act of joining the two parties. The delay of joining these two parties is due to policy matters. We will never say not to join two parties. Both parties need to make systematic preparations." The number of members who changed from the SNDP to the SNLD is 16, one Upper House MP, four Lower House MPs and 11 state representatives.¹³

ANALYSIS

Despite the government's declaring a 90-day state of emergency and imposing martial law in the Kokang region, skirmishes between government forces and MNDAA group continue and has sent thousands fleeing into neighbouring China. Both the government and MNDAA have presented their own versions of the conflict but neither side has initiated or sought to end the fighting. At a time when the government is embarking on national reconciliation and engaged in protracted negotiations with various ethnic armed organizations (EAOs), the fighting in the Kokang region can only be detrimental to the on-going peace process. With the elections scheduled to take place later this year the government should avoid engaging in any large-scale military operations and thus will need to find a way to end the fighting in the Kokang region. The road to achieving a lasting political solution to Myanmar's ethnic conflicts will be long and difficult but can only be achieved through negotiations and engagement.

¹² NLD members put off China visit –

http://www.elevenmyanmar.com/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=9214:nld-members-put-off-china-visit&catid=32:politics&Itemid=354 (Eleven News Media) 4 March 2015

¹³ Shan MP swaps parties –

http://www.elevenmyanmar.com/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=9254:shan-mp-swaps-parties&catid=32:politics&Itemid=354 (Eleven News Media) 9 March 2015